

# Gwydir Customer Advisory Group

## Minutes of Meeting

**Location:** Video Conference

**Date:** 13 July 2021

**Time:** 1.00pm

**Present:** Mark Winter (Chair), Michael Seery, David Reibel, Lindsay White, Jim Cush, Daryl Albertson, Nick Gillingham, Sam Heagney, David Preston (observer), Zara Lowien (observer), Jonathan Dickson, Emma Oates, Enrico Proietti, Sonia Townsend, Sarah Boyd, Anne-Maree Burke and Toni Hayes.

The following attended for specific agenda items: B Mayhew, A Scott, M Barratt, D Swift-Hoadley, A McKenzie-McHarg, G White, G Abood, K Reynolds, D Bailey, K Reynolds, S Flowers, S Pritchard, R Ballard.

**Meeting Opened:** 1.00pm.

### 1. Introduction and Acknowledgement of Country:

#### 1.1 Welcome and introductions:

#### 1.2 Apologies: Nil.

#### 1.3 Confirmation of Agenda Items:

#### 1.4 Declaration of Interest(s):

- Declarations of interest were sought from attendees in relation to the meeting's agenda items. No interests were declared. Items included in the agenda are not considered confidential unless declared as such.

#### 1.5 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 13 April 2021:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [13 April 2021](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*J Cush/D Reibel  
carried*

#### 1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.

#### 1.7 Election of Chairperson

- Mark Winter was nominated and elected Chairperson unopposed.

*J Cush/D Albertson  
carried*

### 2. Assets

#### 2.1 Asset Maintenance (B Mayhew)

- Asset performance and maintenance in the Gwydir valley presented and discussed, including routine preventative and corrective maintenance delivery.
- Tim Tanner has been appointed to the position of Regional Manager, Northern Region (Asset Maintenance and Services).
- Customers questioned learnings from the log removal at Tareelaro Weir, noting it took quite some time before the weir was fully operational, which could be an issue if this was to occur during peak watering. WaterNSW explained that the log was removed safely, and the learnings were to work quickly to come up with a solution but don't close off possibilities and ideas too quickly either.

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## 2.2 Major Projects Update (J Dickson)

- As part of broader reforms of the NSW Water Sector, a new water infrastructure agency, Water Infrastructure NSW (WINSW) has been established within DPIE-Water. Progressively from 1 July 2021, WINSW will now lead the planning and delivery of Government funded water infrastructure projects in NSW, including the transfer of 8 projects previously led by WaterNSW.
- The majority of project staff have moved to WINSW with the projects. WaterNSW and WINSW are working together to ensure the transition is a swift and seamless process.
- WaterNSW will retain a role in the projects as owner and operator or existing land and assets for some projects and service provided to existing and future customers.
- Project updates going forward will be provided by WINSW and can be found on WINSW's website at <https://water.nsw.gov.au/water-infrastructure-nsw>

## 3. Water System Operations:

### 3.1 Water Operations Update (A Scott)

- WaterNSW provided a demonstration of new features and functionality available on the [WaterInsights](#) Portal, including weekly volume and release forecast, daily forecast, allocation outlook for general security, supplementary announcements and operational updates (now within WaterInsights), flow rate forecast is available for some gauges, climate information direct from BOM and an updated Rules tab.
- Data can be downloaded direct from the [WaterInsights](#) page and specific pages can be bookmarked (eg specific gauge data etc).
- Customers provided feedback that it would be useful if the ECA volumes are separated on the allocation tab.
- Customers questioned the timeframes for connecting the DAS to iWAS and river operations and are keen to start seeing the benefits of telemetry. WaterNSW noted it is unlikely in the next 3-6 months, but it is on the workplan.
- Customers stated that a download button on the allocation and usage tab would be very helpful.
- Please send all feedback/suggestions to [insights@waternsw.com.au](mailto:insights@waternsw.com.au) or use the feedback tab on the website. WaterNSW is keen to keep improving the site and receiving feedback and suggestions from customers.

## 4. Presentations/Consultation:

### 4.1 Water Reform Implementation Plan (WRIP) Update

#### Non-Urban Metering Reform Update (D Swift-Hoadley)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the non-urban metering reforms, including a recap on the roll out dates, conditions that apply now for all water users and pathways to compliance.
- If you are not using your water supply works you can make the works **inactive**, which then exempts those works only from the new metering rules. Once inactive, you will not be able to use the works to take any water (including BLR) and will be billed on a one-part tariff (full entitlement charge). To make a works active again, licence holder will need to submit an application, pay the application fee and provide evidence that the works adheres to the metering regulations. For more information visit our website at [www.waternsw.com.au/amendapproval](http://www.waternsw.com.au/amendapproval)
- There are currently 15 pattern approved meters [listed on the MDBA website](#), ranging 25mm-1800mm. A list of compatible data logging and telemetry devices and solutions are listed on [DPIE's website](#). Customers are encouraged to speak to their DQP in relation to appropriate fit for purpose equipment.

- The NSW Government recently announced \$23.6M to assist and encourage water users in the northern MDB in transitioning to telemetry-based metering, including an \$18M rebate available per meter as a \$975 credit applied to customer bills (refer below). Government-owned meters are not eligible.
- Customers stated there are still a number of barriers to full compliance – no device available for MACE equipment, no satellite alternatives, continued barriers to add-on telemetry, and the DAS is still not fully functional. There are customers connected to the DAS who are not getting the benefit as it does not connect to iWAS or river operations information, meaning customers cannot see their own data yet.
- WaterNSW advised that trials are continuing with LIDs that can work with multiple meters, progress in this respect is slow. NRAR can access the reads in the DAS but it is uncertain when customers will have access. DPIE is working through options for satellite LIDs and multi-LIDs but this is proving more difficult than anticipated.
- Customers queried what the issues are with the multi-sensor device. This is a physical barrier for a large number of sites. WaterNSW advised that specifications were worked on in conjunction with DPIE and NRAR then testing handed over. It is believed the issue was with data security.
- Customers expressed frustration that they continue to raise these issues with no solutions forthcoming. Customers can't meet tranche 1 reforms due to technical barriers that the market is not responsive to, and it is unlikely tranche 2 will be any different. Social licence continues to be an important factor for water users who feel they are being hung out to dry as non-compliant, when the rules cannot be achieved and questioned how the regulations will proceed when the market hasn't responded.

**Action GWY2107.01:** WaterNSW to take customers concerns regarding the metering reforms to joint DPIE/NRAR/WaterNSW meeting for discussion/response.

Responsibility: D Swift-Hoadley

#### **Non-Urban Metering Rules Update (A McKenzie-McHarg – DPIE-Water)**

- The NSW and Australian Governments have committed to fund a \$36.1M suite of metering programs, to commence in the 2021-22 financial year, including:
  - \$18M telemetry rebate, for those who have installed telemetry (both mandatory and voluntary), applied retrospectively for all accounts in the DAS
  - \$14.6M government-owned meter capital upgrade program
  - \$1M program First Nations metering traineeship program
  - \$2.5M field program
- Many water users were captured by the rules in the 1 December 2020 rollout simply because their approval details did not reflect what is 'on ground' (eg installed smaller works or inactive works). The key message to water users is to ensure details are up to date. This can be the difference between being captured by the rules or not.
- The DQP portal is the central source of information about the steps water users are taking to become compliant. WaterNSW is upgrading the portal to allow more steps to be recorded and to improve access for water users.
- Upcoming communication and engagement activities for the 1 December 2021 rollout include: mailout to all affected water users in June-July 2021; outbound phone calls to all affected water users in July-August 2021; metering roadshow planned for September 2021; and a second mailout in October-November 2021.
- The Department has extended timeframes for some water users to comply with existing metering conditions in five water sharing plans (Hunter, Richmond, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray-Lower Darling) - [click here for more information](#). The extension does not affect existing regional roll out dates.

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- DPIE and NRAR have a number of resources available to help water users understand the new metering rules, including a [Metering Guidance Tool](#), [Non-Urban Water Metering In NSW: what water users need to know leaflet](#) and [compliance fact sheets](#).

## 4.2 Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR)

### Update on Metering Compliance Campaign (G Abood - NRAR)

- NRAR provided an update on tranche 1 compliance rates for affected works under the non-urban water metering framework, including state-wide statistics and regional breakdown for the Gwydir valley. NRAR has conducted a number of programs looking at water users through targeted sampling via desktop assessments, phone calls and site inspections. Results were then ground-truthed by NRAR site visits.
- NRAR's compliance approach is simple: to be compliant, water users must have accurate, tamper-proof and approved meters installed. The on-ground installation must exactly match the work approval. NRAR will focus efforts on those users who have not progressed far through the compliance pathway (those with the most ground to cover).
- Tranche 1 covered 1126 affected works in the system (active works that have the ability to pump water). There were 715 works remaining after exclusions (including active investigations, government owned meters and COVID restrictions), half of which were either smaller than 500mm or inactive, therefore not subject to the regulation.
- Results showed that state-wide, 23% of affected works are fully compliant; 32% are on the pathway to compliance, having made reasonable efforts to comply; and 45% of affected works are non-compliant and subject to enforcement action.
- For the Gwydir, 17% are fully compliant; 37% are on the pathway to compliance and 46% are non-compliant (60 works).
- Customers suggested there should be an additional category for *cannot currently comply*, due to the technical and physical barriers to meeting the reforms. NRAR stated it is about best endeavours and they are taking into account the willingness and actions taken by customers to become compliant.
- Customers questioned of the 45% non-compliance, how many have no ability to take water or who have not engaged a DQP. NRAR advised this is approximately 50%.
- Customers questioned the figures presented and believe they misrepresent what is happening. Many water users are trying to become compliant but are facing barriers to full compliance which are out of their control and believe they should be captured in the "pathway to compliance" if they have shown best endeavours to become compliant. The results and recent media suggest total non-compliance when in fact you are saying it's only 50% of those sites that have done nothing. If people have ordered a meter, then should be classified as on the pathway to compliance.
- NRAR stated of the 165 sites identified, 45% don't have an accurate meter installed and have not engaged a DQP.
- Customers questioned NRAR's requirement for a work approval to match exactly the on-ground installation, stating this is a departure from the traditional approach. NRAR explained they approach the work approval as an absolute, and their source of truth, for which installed works must match.
- Tranche 2 water users must act now. If water is taken in the Macquarie, Gwydir, Namoi, Border Rivers and Barwon-Darling users may need to comply by 1 December 2021. Customers should review their

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licence and approval details on the [NSW Water Register](#) and use the [NSW Metering Guidance Tool](#) to confirm if this applies to them and then engage a DQP to commence work.

### **Introduction to NRAR's Quarterly Reporting Tool (G White- NRAR)**

- NRAR has released results of its campaigns to help water users understand what they do and to build public confidence that water is being regulated fairly in NSW. [Quarterly Compliance Reports](#) are an easily accessible summary of NRAR's activities for water users and the community and are publicly available on NRAR's website.
- Key activities and non-compliance trends across the state presented (Jan-Mar 2021), including [regional compliance breakdown](#) for the Gwydir.
- NRAR has recently released its [regulatory priorities for 2021-22](#) for water metering and DQPs, irrigated agriculture, overdrawn accounts and extraction limits in at risk water sources, which will be focus over the coming months, as well as enduring priorities.
- [Subscribe to NRAR's newsletter here.](#)

### **4.3 Regulatory Economics – Pricing Determination Engagement (J Dickson)**

- IPART has decided to defer the release of its final reports on WaterNSW's rural bulk water and WAMC's water management prices by 3 months in order to assess WaterNSW's non-urban metering proposal and consult on draft metering prices.
- This decision means the current prices will continue to apply from 1 July to 30 September 2021, with new prices to apply from 1 October 2021.
- Submissions to IPART's supplementary reports close on 23 July 2021. For more information and to view reports, submissions, proposals and consultation, visit [IPART's website](#).

### **Metering**

- IPART's [Supplementary Draft Report on Metering](#) was released on 22 June 2021, seeking customer and stakeholder feedback by 23 July 2021. The report sets out the draft maximum charges that WaterNSW can recover for implementing the NSW Government's metering reforms over the next four years.
- WaterNSW will introduce new charges to recover the costs of metering, including a scheme management charge (annual fee per licence); a telemetry charge (annual fee per meter); a non-telemetry charge (annual fee per meter); and two additional meter service charges will apply to customers with government owned meters.
- Obligations for compliance to the non-urban metering reforms is the responsibility of the work approval holder. There are ongoing obligations for the majority of all works in terms of recording and reporting and for metered works and regular maintenance to ensure the equipment is working accurately.
- IPART will consider all feedback provided in submissions when making its final decision to be published in September 2021.
- Customers questioned how a metering charge for a telemetry site (which gets one visit every 1-2 years) can be the same cost as the metering service charge for a site that gets multiple visits. WaterNSW advised that it is recognised that over time there will be some reductions, after establishment. IPART has included a proposed reduction in costs after implementation is complete based on uptake of telemetry.

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#### **4.4 Gwydir Constraints Measures Project (R Ballard – DPIE-Water)**

- The Gwydir Constraints Measures Project is one of the Northern Basin Toolkit measures to complement the MDB Plan. It will support the reduced water recovery target of 70GL by increasing the efficiency of water for the environment.
- There is an opportunity to secure significant funding to be spent in the Gwydir. Currently working on developing a business case for Government by mid-November 2021, to be developed with the local community, to establish an agreed environmental flow corridor and capture possible measures needed to benefit watercourse users.
- The project seeks to enable both farming and water for the environment to co-exist with improved confidence, with project goals to establish water for the environment corridors in partnership with stakeholders; improve confidence in both farming and environmental water delivery; and improve conservation outcomes.
- Process, timelines and community engagement presented.

#### **4.5 Engagement Landscape – Customer Conversations (J Dickson)**

- IPART is reviewing the way it regulates water utilities and how it sets prices and licence conditions for the monopoly businesses it regulates. Three sessions on future water assessments have been held, including customer engagement, where all NSW water utilities provided input.
- Stakeholder feedback on [Discussion Paper 2 – Promoting A Customer Focus](#) is due by 20 July 2021.

#### **Customer Conversations**

- WaterNSW is taking a new approach to customer engagement on future water pricing to ensure that what we propose in terms of investment reflects our customers' views. newDemocracy has been engaged to start a conversation, which will inform WaterNSW's submission to the regulator for the 2025 Rural Pricing Determination.
- newDemocracy will work with WaterNSW to deliver three key pieces of community engagement: Kitchen Table Discussions; Paired Conversations; and Concise Themes. These projects will take place throughout 2021 and ultimately lead into a deeper engagement process that addresses the question: "how can we best meet our need for water? And, what is a fair way to pay for it?".
- CAG members were sent a copy of the [Kitchen Table Discussion Kit](#) in June, inviting them and their water user group to take part, with feedback due by 30 August 2021. Engagement is open to all stakeholders who have an interest in water.
- For more information or to download a copy of the Kitchen Table Discussion Kit, please visit <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/water/>

#### **4. Business Papers:**

- Noted and taken as read.

#### **5. General Business:**

##### **5.1 Capital Plan FY22-25 Update (C Braddock)**

- WaterNSW provided an update on some changes to the fishway program. Following the public hearing WaterNSW had further consultation with NSW Fisheries and has gone back to IPART with a revised plan agreed to by both WaterNSW and NSW Fisheries.
- Some of the pilot fishways have moved around and there are now revised times for commencement of fishways in the Gwydir. The Tyreel Weir fishway project has been pushed back to commence FY24, with remaining projects pushed back to commence FY25.



- Customers questioned if the revision was done in conjunction with the Gwydir Constraints Measures Project. WaterNSW advised it is aware of the project by DPIE and this was an influencing factor in using another site in the pilot, with uncertainty over whether there would be modifications to Tyreel Weir. We didn't want to construct a fishway then have it raised 2 years later.
- Upgrade of Tyreel Regulator has been pushed back, with agreeance from NSW Fisheries.
- Customers stated completion in FY26-27 seems a long way off. WaterNSW noted the revised concession was to keep as much work within the program as possible as IPART was about to push it back further.

## 5.2 OzFish TED Talk

- D Albertson advised there are still tickets available to the OzFish TED Talk at the Moree RSL Club on 21 July if anyone is interested. With Covid restrictions, tickets need to be booked in advance (no cost, food included). Bookings can be made at <https://ozfish.org.au/projects/thinking-fish-public-talks/thinking-fish-moree/>. A recording will be made available after.

## 5.3 Water System Operations

- Customers noted there is a lot of water coming down the Carole, with less in the Mehi and Moomin, and questioned why more went to the Carole as a lot of crops are getting flooded.
- DPIE-EES noted they have been sending as much water away from the Gingham as they can (down the Mehi and Carole) for the past couple of months and has send notifications to landholders regarding intentions.
- Customers requested a meeting with WaterNSW to provide further information.

**Action GWY2107.02:** WaterNSW to contact Mark Winter to discuss current releases in the Carole.

Responsibility: A Scott

### Meeting Review and Close

**Next Meeting:** 12 October 2021

**Meeting closed:** 4.30pm

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## Gwydir Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 13 July 2021

### Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
<b>GWY2104.03</b>	WaterNSW to review process of data steps from the DAS into iWAS.	R Cocks / M Barratt	There is more work to come to connect the DAS to iWAS. Is up and running and collecting data.

### New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
<b>GWY2107.01</b>	WaterNSW to take customers concerns regarding the metering reforms to joint DPIE/NRAR/WaterNSW meeting for discussion/response.	D Swift-Hoadley	
<b>GWY2107.02</b>	WaterNSW to contact Mark Winter to discuss current releases in the Carole.	A Scott	

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